



# Legislative Brief

February 14, 2018

## OHIO SENATE REACHES A REDISTRICTING DEAL WITH THE FAIR DISTRICT COALITION

After years of advocacy and months of gathering over 200,000 signatures on petitions to put on the November ballot, the Senate agreed to a change in the drawing of Congressional Districts in Ohio for 2022. The coalition includes: the League of Women Voters, Common Cause in Ohio, Heather Taylor Miesle (Ex. Director of the Ohio Environment Council). As it appeared very likely that the volunteers were going to meet the necessary signature totals to put the proposal on the November ballot, the Ohio Senate of the Oversight and Reform Committee drafted their own version and began negotiations with the leaders of the Fair Districts-Fair Elections Committee.

Senator Matt Huffman (R-Lima) introduced a substitute version of SJR-5 to answer some of the concerns that Fair Districts advocates called for changes. The biggest concern was too many splits in voting districts.

Secretary of State John Husted said that a reform only needs two rules: one requiring a bi-partisan vote; and two, don't divide counties until the whole population of the county has been used up to draw a district. "Bi-partisan votes don't divide counties-boom!"

Taylor Miesle said that she agrees with what Husted said, "He told Cleveland.com that a Redistricting plan needs only 2 key rules: a bipartisan vote and limiting county splits by dividing them only after the entire population has been used to draw a district. Limiting county splits is key to limiting Gerrymandering. But Republicans want the ability to split the state's more populous counties into 2 or 3 congressional Districts. Coalition supporters say that could dilute Democratic Votes. Senator Huffman and Heather Taylor Miesle were both Optimistic that they could reach agreement with a little more discussion.

*"But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seem to have died and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace"*

(Solomon 3: 1-3 NRSV)

REDISTRICTING DEAL  
BETWEEN THE  
LEGISLATURE AND THE  
FAIR DISTRICTS AND  
FAIR ELECTIONS PUTS  
OHIO FAR AHEAD OF  
MOST OTHER STATES!

THANKS TO ALL INVOLVED

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*Ohio Council of Churches (OCC)*

*6161 Busch Blvd. Suite 100*

*Columbus, OH 43229-2553*

*Phone: 614/885-9590*

*Fax: 614/885-6097*

*E-mail: mail@ohcouncilchs.org*

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Tom Smith, Editor

The major key issues were as follows: how to limits splits; whether to require districts be exactly the same population; minority party votes required to pass the final bill; require maps reflect representational fairness. The major complaint was allowing the 10 most populous counties to be split into multiple Congressional districts. Rep. Vernon Sykes said, “By minimizing splits you’re minimizing the ability to gerrymander.” The Senate reduced their number of splits. They proposed an amendment to the Ohio Constitution that meets the standards of the Fair Districts-Fair Elections Coalition. They said:

1. that 65 counties can not be split at all.
2. 18 can only be split once.
3. 5 counties can be split twice.
4. Cleveland and Cincinnati must be kept whole.

The other agreements that both approved are as follows.

1. Both parties must be meaningfully engaged in the press.
2. Communities should not be needlessly divided.
3. Maps cannot be drawn to favor a political party or candidate.
4. Passage of a map requires 3/5ths vote of both House and Senate and must include at least 50% support of the minority party members.

Why do we need a change in how we decide Congressional districts every 10 years? If we use 2016 as an example, the results of district manipulation. a victory margin for Ohio’s Congressional races was 36.3 points, the closest race was not close at all decided by 18.4 points.

Since 2012, the first election using the current maps drawn by Republican computers, not a single seat has changed parties. Ohio’s electorate has fluctuated between 46 and 60 percent Republican in the number of votes cast over the past decade, yet Republicans hold 75% of the Congressional district seats for Ohio in Washington D.C. In 2000, the GOP got 50% of the vote and nearly 60 of the seats. In 2004, the GOP got 50% and 65% of the seats. In 2008, the GOP got 45% of the vote and 42% of the seats. In 2012, the GOP got 50% of the vote and nearly 75% of the seats. In 2016, they got 60% and are still holding on to 75% of the seats.

The Leaders of the Fair Districts praise the latest version of SJR-5. “The real winners are the voters of Ohio who will see their communities remain whole and their Congressional representative remained beholden to them after they are elected.

House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger said, “tonight Ohio took one step closer to history bipartisan Congressional redistricting reform.